FICTION FROM THE AFRO ARCHIVES

'I Just Hate Heroes'

Sam was the kind of guy who goes fishing and forgets the bait. He might have been a good football player, but he couldn't remember the signals. Nevertheless, he captured a killer.

By Ann A. Shockley

Leave it to Sam. Come on a fishing trip and of all things, he forgets the bait! That was just like Sam.

He rolled over on his side and mashed out the cigarette in an old tin can on the floor. The night was foreclosing on the day, gradually ebbing the light into the embracing folds of darkness.

He stared out the small cabin window and thought it was awfully hot, like August was trying to hold onto all the summer heat. Cricket music floated through the window, breaking the stillness.

Impatiently he glanced at his watch. Eight p.m. Sam had gone to town for the bait a half-hour ago. He should be back around eight-thirty. Yeah, leave it to Sam. Even in college Sam was forgetful.

Take the time he played center on the college grid team, and in that big homecoming game with Howard, Sam couldn't remember the signals caught the ball and forgot to throw it to him.

Instead, the stupid jerk carried the ball for a fifty-yard touchdown and ended up a hero. Score 6-0.

* * *

HE REACHED over and snapped on the portable radio they had brought with them. A band was blaring out a hot jump number. He tapped his fingers in time with the music. It helped to drown out the monotonous symphony of crickets and frogs.

He thought, it was lonely here in the woods by himself.

All summer he and Sam had planned this fishing trip. And, of all things, Sam — who was supposed to take charge of the equipment department — had forgotten the bait! Knowing Sam, he should have checked.

Suddenly the smooth dance music was cut-off by the announcer's voice; "Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin.

"All motorists are warned to be on the lookout for an escaped homicidal maniac from the State Insane Asylum. The escapee is described as George Harlem, age forty-five, heavy-set, five foot nine, black hair, dark eyes, and a scar on his right cheek.

"This man is dangerous. Anyone seeing him or knowing his whereabouts is asked to notify the State Police."

* * *

THE VOICE ended and a record came on. He stretched wearily on the hard cot. It was hot. Without looking, he reached over and felt his pack of cigarettes. The pack felt limp.

He held it up to the oil lamp. Two left. He searched his pockets. No more. He had forgotten the cigarettes! and only two.

Well, he couldn't blame that on Sam. Then he remembered! The cigarettes were in the pocket of the car. He breathed a sigh of relief.

Casually he glanced out the window. The night had eclipsed the day. Lazily he struck a match and took a deep draw on his cigarette. Abruptly the music stopped again and the announcer's voice blared forth alarmingly:

". . . all motorists and campers in the Millweed Camping area are warned to be on the lookout for the escaped insane George Harlem who was last reported seen in that area. The man is dangerous and believed armed. We repeat . . ."

* * *

MILLWEED? That was here! He swung his leg quickly over the cot and pressed his ear to the radio. A slight quiver invaded his stomach. He wouldn't admit what the quiver meant.

Instinctively he turned to look out the window. The night appeared blacker than ever. Black and foreboding and full of secrets. Maybe George Harlem was standing right outside his window now looking at him!

The quiver increased in his stomach, splashing wavelike in him. Quickly he slammed the door. It was open. In one swift movement, he sprang to the door and bolted it.

He leaned against the door, breathing hard. It was hotter than ever in the room, but he was safe. He stared at the lamp. Maybe he ought to blow it out. But if he did, perhaps George Harlem would think the cabin was empty and try to get in. Who knows what an insane person thinks?

* * *

HE DECIDED to leave the light on. Perhaps it would frighten him away. The burned low, forgotten cigarette stung his fingers. He had wasted it. He took one more drag and crushed it on the bare floor.

The moon rolled out from a cloud and smiled down brightly. He never knew he'd be so glad to see the moon. But then, George Harlem was glad to see the moon too!

He swallowed a mouthful of air and leaned back. Why was Sam so long going 15 miles? What a fishing trip!

* * *

THEN HE heard it: the distant sound of a car winding up the road. Sam!

His feet touched the floor and quickly he darted for the door. Shakily his fingers started to unbolt it. Then he stopped. Maybe it wasn't Sam. Maybe George Harlem had stolen a car. Maybe—

He grabbed the wooden frame door. The quivering splashed within him again. His knees felt weak and his heart pounded syncopatedly.

The car stopped right outside the cabin. His throat was dry. A door closed softly. Too softly. Footsteps crunched towards the cabin and stopped. A hand turned the knob. Silence. Breathless tense — silence. Then:

He wanted to call out: "Sam." But he couldn't. Nothing would come out. The knock again. This time louder and more insistent.

"Hey, Rudy, open the door!"

* * *

SAM! IT was Sam! But maybe it wasn't Sam. Maybe George Harlem was pretending he was Sam. Crazy people, he had heard, were good at that.

"Cats-s-s! Rudy. Open the door. I'm tired!"

Yeah. It was Sam. No one else talked in that booming coarse tone. Instantly he unlocked the door. Sam stood there, outlined in the moonlight.

"Were you asleep?"

The question caught him off-guard. Sleep? "Yeah, I was asleep," he lied.

Sam's big frame came in the smothered room. "Cats it's hot in here. Where's the lamp?" He struck a match, saw the lamp, and lit it.

It was then he got a good look at Sam. His shirt was torn into shreads. A red gash was across his cheek and a bruise under his left eye.

"What happened, Sam?"

Sam shrugged and lay down on the cot. "A crazy guy escaped from the asylum and I had to catch him for the dumb cops."

"You?" It was almost a whisper.

"Sure," he murmured. Coolly taking off his shirt. "I was on the way back and picked up a hitch-hiker, and it was the escaped maniac. I didn't know it then, not until he tried to get tough and take the car. But, shucks, after knocking off eight Japs singlehandedly, it was nothing, persuading him to go back."

* * *

THE VOICE went on bragging. He half listened. "How far away was that, Sam?" he asked weakly.

"Hum-m-m, 'bout five miles from here."

Five miles! If it hadn't been for Sam. I . . .

". . . reporters took my picture and everything."

Suddenly he was angry. That was Sam. Ends up a hero. But what would he have done? Like he did in the cabin? Act a coward? He shuddered and glanced admittingly at his friend. Heck, everybody can't be a hero. But he's never let Sam know how scared he had been.

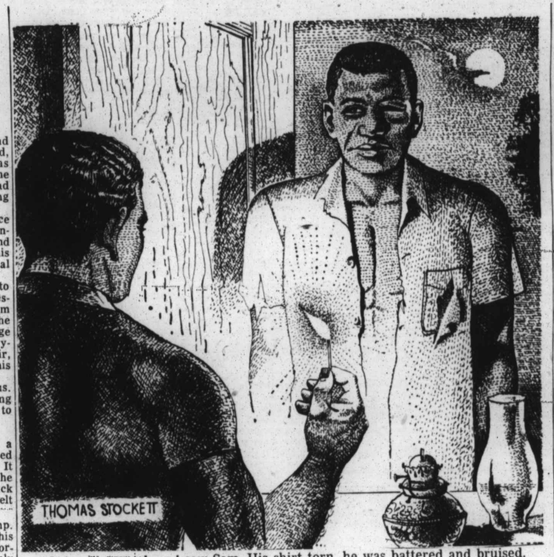
"Say, Sam, think it'll be a good morning for fishing."

"Huh? Yep, suppose so," he replied sleepily Then: "Cats-s-s!"

"What's the matter, Sam?"

"I left the bait in the store on the counter. Got so excited when I heard about the escaped crazy guy I dashed right out!"

He held tightly to the table as the room began to swirl in bright red waves. Leave it to Sam!



I struck a match and saw Sam. His shirt torn, he was battered and bruised.



AFRO PATTERNS

Just soft, slimming lines—that's the secret of flattery for larger figures. This new Printed Pattern has a softly paneled skirt; unusually pretty interest at the neckline.

Printed Pattern 4581: Women's Sizes 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48. Size 36 takes 4¼ yards 35-inch fabric; ⅞ yard contrast.

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Send FIFTY CENTS in coins for each pattern—add 5 cents for each pattern for 1st-class mailing. Send to ANNE ADAMS, care of AFRO-AMERICAN, 219, Pattern Dept. 243 West 17th St., New-York 11, N.Y. Print plainly NAME, ADDRESS with ZONE, SIZE and STYLE NUMBER.

AFRO Magazine Section

THE AFRO-AMERICAN, APRIL 5, 1958 PAGE 1

Where Did You Get Your Name

What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.

* * *

If your name is Reid, did you know that it may be because you're descended from a red-head?

* * *

Would it surprise you to learn that Al Smith of the White Sox and Ernie Kovacs of TV fame, may have a family tie?

* * *

Suppose someone were to say one of your pro basketball favorites is descendant of a marmaduke, and another from Richard the Lion Hearted, would you scoff at 'em?

By SAM LACY

"If a man's name is Sam Brown or John Smith or Henry Jones," my late father used to say, "it's a betting chance he's colored."

It was the Ole Man's way of solving the family problem of determining whether the subject of a news story was colored or white.

Twenty years ago, the daily newspapers in our town, as they did in so many American cities, identified with racial tags, all colored persons involved in criminal acts, or accused of some deed that might discredit himself and his race.

Those tan citizens who were making valuable contributions to the community, were rarely distinguished by race, if they were publicized at all.

The result was that the average colored household was left to its own devices to discover whether, for example, Richard Wright, the author of "Native Son," was someone the family —or a particular member of it —may, or should, know.

* * *

ONE OF the most popular of these devices was that suggested at the outset of this piece: to pay attention when the name reads George, Sam, Jim, John, Henry, etc., and especially when it's followed by Jones, Brown, Smith, Johnson, and the like.

Chances are that much went on among his own people that the colored man never knew about in those days.

Certainly if that were the practice today (and there were no modern products like television and the colored press) he'd be living in a world of darkness.

Suppose, for instance, the nation's sports pages, now virtually devoid of racial tags, had to be scrutinized with the idea of measuring one's interest by the names of the heroes.

* * *

FORGETTING for the moment your likes or dislikes for one team or another, whom would you root for in the baseball camps: Donald Newcombe or John Gray? Lawrence. Raines and Joseph Caffie, or Robert Smith and Allen Jones?

Of course, most baseball fans know that Newcombe is a tan pitcher with the Los Angeles Dodgers and Gray is a white rookie righthander on the roster of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Others may know that Raines and Caffie are colored prospects with the Cleveland Indians; that Smith is a Boston Red Sox hopeful and Jones, also white, is hoping for a job with the Indians at Tucson, Arizona.

All of which helps prove that names of stars of the sports world can be very confusing for the person or persons trying to use them as racial ties.

* * *

BASEBALL, for instance, has its Henry Aaron, its Willie Mays, its Billy Harrell, Brooks Lawrence, Roy Campanella and John Roseboro, as well as its Newcombe, Raines, Caffie and others.

Basketball gets into the confuse-you-please picture with its Wilton Chamberlain, Archibald Dees and Woodrow Saulsberry.

Boxing offers Zora Folley and Joseph Barrow.

Football comes up with Eugene Lipscomb and Rommie Loudd.

Tennis might throw you with Reginald Weir and/or Althea Gibson.

Track's Andrew Stanfield or Ira Murchison or Charles Dumas might cause you trouble.

* * *

AND THERE could be many more headaches for anyone who sought to employ names as he did phonetics in the early days of learning to spell.

How'd these unusual surnames find their way into the respective backgrounds of our heroes?

Let's trace them to their origin.

THE OVERWHELMING majority of American family names, of course, go back to European beginnings. And virtually all of these were derived in one or another of four ways, according to the leading genealogists.

One may have come from the progenitor's place of residence.

Another may have been adopted because of his occupation.

* * *

ALMOST EVERY city, town, or village of the Middle Ages has served to name one or more families. Many of these places no longer exist, hence they may not be recognizable on maps.

A man could have gained his name by living near a certain lake or brook or river.

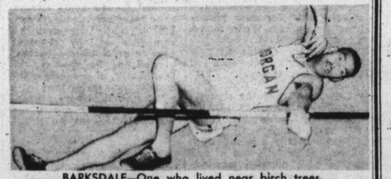
Another may have owned a manor at one place and became so identified when he moved elsewhere.

WHATEVER he is in your part of the world, the guy who started his string away back there, was a handler or forger of metals.

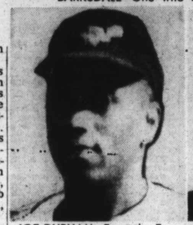
Who knows, then, but that Al Smith of the Chicago White Sox, and television's Ernie Kovacs may have a family tie of some kind?

Nicknames based on the progenitor's physical appearance also played a major part in the passing around of our more common names.

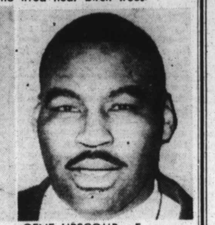
The guy called "Red," for example, started the Redds, Reeds, Reids, etc., in English; he started the Rousee and Rousseaus in French, and the Roths in German.



BARKSDALE—One who lived near birch trees.



JOE DURHAM—From the English island near a hill of the same name.



GENE LIPSCOMB—From enclosed hollow in Buckingham, England.



VERN McCAIN—Irish form of John.



MEL TRIPLETT—Youngest of three simultaneous births.

Uncommon Names

Here's how several of the uncommon names reached the present day sports scene:

AARON, Hank (National League MVP) — is English and descends from the place of residence on Lofty Mountain, on which the progenitor was known to boast of the free air he enjoyed.

BARKSDALE, Bob (ex-Morgan State College track star) — name is English; progenitor lived at or near Valley of the birch trees.

BARROW, Joe (former heavyweight champ) — name is English; came from or lived near the Barrow Woods.

BOOZER, Bob (star, Kansas State basketball team) — name Dutch-English; meaning strong, angry man who dwelt near the cattle stall.

CAMPANELLA, Roy (Los Angeles Dodgers) — name Italian, derived from one who lived near the bells of Milano.

CALHOUN, Lee (Olympic hurdles champion) — Irish-Scottish; progeny of battle hero Cathluan; name a contraction of Colquhoun.

CHAMBERLAIN, Wilt (All-America basketball player) — English-French; progenitor was officer in charge of private household of king or important nobleman.

CLIFTON, Nat (pro basketball star) — name English; from forbears having lived on a hill slope or river bank.

CROWE, George (Cincinnati Redlegs first baseman)—English dweller at the Sign of the Crowe, often-used display before taverns of the era.

DEES, Archie (champion Big Ten basketball scorer at Indiana) — Irish; from Deaghadh, meaning lucky.

DUKES, Wat'y (pro basketer) — English; reduction from Marmaduke.

DUMAS, Charley (world record high jumper) — French; it means dweller on a small farm.

DURHAM, Joe (Orioles baseball player)—English; from the island with a hill known as Durham.

FOLLEY, Zora (heavyweight title contender) — Irish; equivalent to French Follett, meaning the little fellow of high humor.

GIBSON, Althea (world champion woman tennis player) — English; progenitor a son of Gib, pet form of Gilbert.

HARRELL, Billy (Indians player) — English; came from the hamlet of Harel in Normandy.

IRVIN, Cal (A. and T. basketball coach) — Scottish; name of several villages in early Scotland.

LAWRENCE, Brooks (Cincinnati pitcher) — English; from Laurel, symbol of victory.

LILLY, Marshall (one-time Greentree racing trainer) —English; from Meadowland where flax and lilies grew in abundance in Hertfordshire.

LIPSCOMB, Gene (pro football star) — English; from Letcombe, ledge in a valley of Berkshire, or Liscombe, an enclosed hollow in Buckingham.

LOUDD, Rommie (ex-UCLA Rose Bowl football star) — English; dweller near the lake known as "The Loud One" in Lancashire.

McCAIN, Vern (Md. State College athletic director) — Irish; son of Eoin, Irish form of John, meaning gift of Jehovah.

MATSON, Ollie (pro football star) — English; son of Mat, pet form of Matthew.

MAYS, Willie (San Francisco Giants) — English-French; along with May, Mayes, etc., another form of Matthew.

MOTLEY, Marion (ex-pro fullback star) — Eng-

(Continued on Page Two)